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FILM REVIEWS, BY JNO.

DECISION RESERVED

TROUBLE IN STORE

(Rank-Two Cities)

THE criticism of comedy (as I should know well enough by now) can make a fool of any commentator. Laughter knows no laws, save that where it is involved (and I quote) one man's Mede is another man's Persian. But the reviewer must occasionally rush in where angels would erect No Thoroughfare notices—if candour is one of the clauses in his contract. Spurred thus by conscience, I am bound to declare that Norman Wisdom, "the little man who is loved by millions," and "the greatest funny man in the world today," left me only perfunctorily amused.

Certainly I laughed loudly enough at times during the screening of *Trouble in Store*. To see a professional funny man caught in a swing door, or with his trousers on fire, or festooned with duckweed, is to get a nudge on the spiritual funnybone. But laughter of that kind is a pretty primitive kind of reflex. It lacks warmth, it lacks kindness—and laughing at a person is never such good fun as laughing with him. These are, of course, the veriest clichés of criticism—but they are true, and they do apply in great measure to Norman Wisdom's current comic style.

There was, however, something which disturbed me more, and which fixed him firmly (for the time being, at least) in a much lower category than other "little man" comics I have known and loved: he's so confoundingly sorry for himself. When he sang "I'm a Fool" or "I Need You, Need You, Need You," he was lachrymose to the point of embarrassment. Not, I must hasten to explain, because he made me feel lachrymose, too. Chaplin has given me glimpses of a divine despair, Danny Kaye is not all laughter, and I have tender as well as hilarious recollections of old Stan Laurel. But none of these ever pleaded with me for sympathy; they had more honest methods of extracting it, and they had an inner integrity as funny men which gave them a dignity of sorts even in the most farcical situations.



Phyllis Calvert and James Donald in
"The Net"

BAROMETER

MAINLY FAIR: "Trouble in Store."
FAIR: "The Net."
OVERCAST: "Volcano."

Chaplin was, of course, the best exemplar. He was more often than not caught in the Fell Clutch of Circumstance, but he didn't wince or cry aloud—he just kept wriggling, and we cheered him on. Norman Wisdom (at least in the role of the humblest and most bumble-footed employee of Burridge's great department store) wriggles only just so long, then hangs limp. That he escapes is not his doing at all. Circumstance (apparently) just drops him and dusts her fingers.

But he is not a person to be written off at a first viewing. Among the moister patches of slapstick there were glimpses of genuine fun, and indications of an as yet inadequately developed gift. If he can overcome a tendency to bray like a jackass, and stop trying to be a Donald Peers in motley, he might become a true comic yet. Compare him with Margaret Rutherford, who also frequents Burridge's store, and perhaps you'll understand what I've been driving at.

THE NET

(Rank-Two Cities)

THE NET is a brisk, taut piece of melodrama (produced by Antony Darnborough and directed by Anthony Asquith), which will inevitably remind you of *The Sound Barrier*. And if you are content to accept melodrama, smoothly purveyed and accompanied at times by exciting photography, then you should enjoy this almost as much. Dramatically, it doesn't aim so high as *The Sound Barrier*—the human relationships are subordinated to the excitements of sabotage and counter-intelligence—but on the other hand, the sky is something less than the limit where Professor James Donald's hyper-supersonic fighter is concerned. To the conventional jet engine, nuclear reactors have been added and where the old Hawker Hunter creaked along at Mach 1, Mach 3 is nothing to the new prototype. It can stand a 5G turn, too. As in the earlier film, the most breathtaking sequences of *The Net* are the aerial ones (the Mach 3 touch is most effectively contrived) and the cameramen under Desmond Dickinson, undoubtedly take the honours. But it's a pretty smooth show all round and exciting enough to keep your feet braced tight against the seat in front.

VOLCANO

(Panaria)

THIS film (produced and directed by William Dieterle) was filmed on a small island off the coast of Italy. Honest sunlight, therefore, takes the place of klieg lights, and the locals provide a background frieze of arresting, individual faces. There is, too, the great Anna Magnani. But I'm not crying any hosannas for Anna this time. The story wandered, Anna showed few signs of volcanic activity, and (strictly *entre nous*) I twice found myself dozing. Before the end—which, by all reports, was lurid enough—I crept disconsolately home.

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 3, 1954.